

# The Advocate Current

Advocates For Homeless Families Newsletter

Winter 2009

**Advocates** empowers motivated families to overcome homelessness. Our families succeed through a two-year structured program of housing, education, and support services.

Proudly serving the Frederick community since 1988.



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## Advocates Gala: a Success!

Advocates held its annual Gala dinner at Martin's in Walkersville on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. Martin's put on its usual tasty spread, beginning with hand-passed hors d'oeuvres and a cheese display. The guests enjoyed these delights while deliberating over which raffle items to "spend" their tickets on. The Sinistral Jazz Trio with Dr. Robert Strain provided just the right sounds for relaxing and mingling during the social hour.

The Gala is always a celebration of the successes of our participants as well as a time to thank our many supporters for the help they give us throughout the year. This year, though, we also had to recognize the sudden and sad passing, last spring, of one of our participants,



Starr Jackson. Starr had been a model participant: enthusiastic, energetic, and thoroughly committed to the program. A video focusing on Starr and these qualities introduced the attendees to her indomitable spirit. Because she had literally been a "shining star" in our program, the Board of Directors, working with Jenny Burgard, the Family Advocate, decided to rename the "Participant of the Year" Award. It has now become the "Shining Starr Award," in honor and remembrance of Starr. Starr's 5-year-old daughter was on hand with other members of her family to receive the inaugural award, a gold-colored, palm-sized, engraved star.

There was, indeed, much to celebrate, however. Bert Lams of the California guitar Trio, entertained with several memorable numbers. Our own Ted Luck, of the Board of Directors, proved himself to be quite the stand-up comic as he provided ongoing commentary during the drawing of the raffle tickets. The winners took home some lovely items donated by the likes of Needles and Pins, Buckeystown Pub, Muse, Etiquette, Grapevine, Venus on the Half Shell, and Brewer's Alley. (continued pg 2)

(Advocates Gala Continued)



Misti Morningstar of Morningstar Designs, and Rick Simons of Sir Speedy Printing were both recipients of the Annual Corporate Philanthropy Award: Misti, for designing, free of charge, Advocates' distinctive logos and print pieces, and Rick for providing printing services for Advocates at no cost. Both have enabled Advocates to use what would have been spent on those services for direct services to our participants. Ken Allread was recognized as Advocates' Volunteer of the Year. Ken, though retired, has

made Advocates his full time job, spending countless hours writing grants and doing other administrative chores, freeing the paid staff for other important tasks. Frederick County Bank and Avanti Marble were recognized as major Gala sponsors.

The high point of the evening arrived as we recognized Christina as Advocates' Shining Starr, the Participant of the Year. Christina's journey, from living with her kids in their car, to finishing a nursing program at FCC, to getting a good job, was chronicled in a second video. Christina was given the first (as opposed to the "Inaugural") Shining Starr Award, to much applause from the audience.

It was a terrific evening, but the work is never done. We are already making plans for next year's big fundraiser!

### Benefit Painting

Esteemed artist Ralph Basford painted a beautiful new original artwork entitled "View from the Park" to benefit Advocates for Homeless Families in the summer of 2009. The painting depicts the view of Frederick's "clustered Spires" as seen looking north at Carroll Creek in Baker Park. Glicee prints (20"x30") on canvas of "View from the Park" are \$120 and can be purchased by calling Advocates for Homeless Families, Inc. at (301) 662-2003.



**Our 2008 Annual Report is now online!**

**Check our website: [www.afhf.org](http://www.afhf.org)**

## **Homelessness: Why does it happen?**

Homelessness can happen for a variety of reasons. Loss of income can be difficult for a (2) income family, but it is devastating to an individual that is caring for a family alone. Many jobs in the area simply don't pay enough to allow an individual to meet their families financial obligations. Homelessness can also be caused by a serious illness combined with a lack of affordable health care. As health care costs rise, the amount of money left to spend on household necessities or a mortgage payment decrease. Domestic violence can also lead to homelessness. Too often, if the abused party leaves, they have nowhere to go, which leads to the next contributing factor; lack of family support. Not everyone has a strong local support system to fall back on when times get tough.

## **So what does Advocates do to help treat the causes?**

At Advocates, we have two programs: Traditional Housing and Families Forward. Transitional Housing, is designed as a maximum two-year intensive program for people who are or will imminently become homeless. This program provides housing to participants, along with weekly life skills workshops, monthly support groups, weekly meetings with our Family Advocate, access to higher education or job training, access to a network of community resources, and volunteer mentoring. All participants pay a monthly housing fee, based on their income after child care. Our second program, Families Forward, is another two-year program. Families Forward is designed for families in the Frederick area who are at least 50% below the median income for the DC/Metro area. Eligible families receive services and support, and gain access to resources designed to maintain and strengthen their self-sufficiency and independence. Participants of both programs must be drug-free and sober if they have a history of alcoholism. They must be motivated to pursue higher education and/or job training, and they must be actively seeking gainful employment. **Advocates provides a hand-up, not a hand-out.** We are designed to empower families that already have the motivation and determination it takes to overcome homelessness.

## **2009 Achievements:**

Seven participants have started a college program. Two participants are working towards a Bachelor's degree and one is working on a Master's program. Four people are preparing to take or have taken the GED so far this year. We have had nine participants working towards a degree in nursing, from CNA to MSN.

Participants have improved our financial awareness this year with two workshops on understanding credit, monthly workshops on financial awareness and a portion of each case management meeting dedicated to individual financial goals. So far this year we have obtained credit reports for every participant and created individualized plans for each participant to improve their credit score.

**Bednights for 2009 to date = 7973**

**Participants Served in 2009 = 33**

**Children Served in 2009 = 58**

**Families Served in 2009 = 32**

## Volunteer Events

Advocates offers housing in one of our 14 units in and around Frederick. We rely on volunteers to assist with maintenance and improvements to the properties.



This year, we have hosted (3) major volunteer days. The 2009 Spring Spruce Day was attended by over 45 people from the community and our program participants. Volunteers painted, raked leaves, planted flowers, washed windows and did yard work.

Members of the All Saints' Episcopal Church assisted with two major improvement projects. In September, a laundry facility was updated and new laundry hookups were installed. In October, a ground-level deck was built onto conjoined townhouse units to minimize yard work and provide a level structure for family play and activities.

## Fund-Raising Events

Advocates held many new fund-raising events this year to help meet the rising costs of our programs. More than \$16,000 was raised through these grass-root efforts. Each of the events – except for the Gala -- was a new venture for Advocates. Staff and Board Members devoted significant time and energy into preparations for the events to ensure smooth execution. Each of the events is described briefly below:

**Yard Sale**, June 27 -- Hundreds of household items were donated by Frederick County citizens and most of the items were sold at rock-bottom prices to bargain hunters. The event was held on Shields Drive, behind Lowe's Home Improvement Center, in space donated by Shields Motor Homes. Participants and staff brokered deals over the smallest to largest items. Starting at 9:00 a.m. and ending at 4 p.m., it was a long day, but well worth it.

**Patrons Dinner and Art Show**, July 14 – Held at Volt, one of Frederick's premier restaurants, the dinner was designed and made to order by Top Chef Contestant Bryan Voltaggio and lavishly served to 45 fortunate diners. Music was provided by Bob Strain at the piano during the cocktail hour. The art show presented original art works donated by area artists and featured Ralph Basford's *View from the Park*, which can be seen on page two of this newsletter. The painting depicts a view of the Frederick spires from Baker Park on a summer day.

**California Guitar Trio Concert**, October 9 -- Hosted by All Saints Episcopal Church, the California Guitar Trio played music to appeal to all tastes – classical, folk, world, new age, a little rock and even an old surfer tune from the sixties. Advocates was designated this year as the non-profit recipient of the concert proceeds.



## Advocates Is a Family Relief Fund Recipient

Advocates recently was awarded a Family Relief Fund grant from the Community Foundation of Frederick County to assist six families in our Families Forward program to pay for essential utilities (gas, water, and electric) during the last quarter of the year. The Family Relief Fund is a one-year fund, established by the Community Foundation to help Frederick County citizens affected by the current economic crisis to meet basic living expenses. Families Forward is a two-year program that provides at-risk families, who are housed independently, with case management services, assistance with education or vocational training, budgetary counseling and education, life-skills workshops, and group support.